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ABSTRACT

The articles in this journal issue focus on adolescent literature. In the first article, author John Neufeld discusses how he chooses a particular topic and writes to uncover his own particular bias. The second article discusses the theme of "a price must be paid" in the works of Ouida Sebestyen while the third article presents an interview with Dean Hughes, author of a Missouri history trilogy. The fourth article discusses three major revisions in a college syllabus for the teaching of adolescent literature: an increased emphasis on the study of literature, a revised reading list incorporating several types of adolescent literature, and an indepth examination of the transition theory. The final article reports on a study that examined the reading interests of students in the panhandle of Nebraska. The issue also contains a review of media materials for use in teaching adolescent literature, brief reviews of new books, and the abstract of a dissertation that surveyed the status of the young adult novel in the secondary school English classroom. (HOD)

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YOUNG ADULT PROPAGANDA AND CHANGE

John Neufeld

Over the past fifteen years, I have been asked by many well-meaning (I assume) people why I write as often as I do for Young Adults. I've had, therefore, a lot of time to formulate an answer. It is only *my* answer. I would not presume to imagine any other writer's response.

It certainly isn't, or wasn't, for the money. My first novel, *Edgar Allan*, brought me a total advance of $750. Divide that in half — half on signing, half on delivery — and you have a very thin year, indeed. (For *Lisa, Bright and Dark*, the advance was identical.)

It wasn't for recognition. All authors are subject to the same cocktail party exchange: "Oh? Would you have written anything I might know?" My answer: "Probably not. Millions of people don't...unless you have children."

It wasn't for awards and honors, or for opportunities to teach. I've had none of the former, although I admit to yearning for a chance to do the latter.

If not for fame and fortune, why?

To be felt. To make oneself felt at a vulnerable moment in someone else's life. To present ideas to readers young enough not to have immediate experience of the subject and yet to arm them, so that if ever they find themselves in situations about which they might have read, they have some sort of experience upon which to draw.

Because I feel strongly about certain things, I want other people — young people, especially — to know about them.

Admittedly, I feel strongly as an adult. The subjects of my books are not taken from my own memories of growing up. Rarely is autobiographical detail included. But the inequalities, unfairnesses, injustices that exercise me as a voter, as a member of any community, as an ordinary human being are those that I want to present to others.

The fact that I choose a particular topic, I imagine, uncovers my own particular bias in each case.

In *Edgar Allan*, for example, neither the family nor the problem of interracial adoption was my own. But I felt, and do still, that the process can be successful, healthy, and happy. There may and probably will be problems. But these can be overcome with honesty and good-will and affection. That Edgar Allan is given away, that the Ficketts failed is their peculiar story. I felt it was an honest portrayal of a situation, but it need not have ended as it did. *That* is the point.

What could I hope for in writing a story that on its outside seemed pessimistic and saddening? That young people would calmly consider the choices made and the paths taken and be able to think what they might do in the same instance. And that they would *agree* with me — it need not have turned out so.

For that is the ultimate aim of the stories I tell. I *want* agreement. I want it early. I want it to last. And I purposely choose to present my theories and feelings to people whose own experiences and sensations are necessarily somewhat more embryonic and limiting than my own.

In short, *Edgar Allan* is a novel of propaganda. And so is *Lisa*. And *Sleep Two, Three, Four?* And almost every other project that's ever seen daylight.

Is this taking unfair advantage of willing minds? Am I subverting youthful independence and investigation? And I lobbying unfairly?

I don't think so.

I have often — most recently, on the publication of *A Small Civil War* — been criticized for trying to be too even-handed at the expense of tension and character in a story.

That's a danger of which I'm always aware, and which I try mightily to skirt, not always with success.

But as a moral propagandist — i.e., I feel a responsibility to put a *whole* case before the public, not a one-sided one — I don't see any alternative. The best I can hope to do is present arguments for and against a certain point of view, and work hard to make the reader come down on *my* side. (There *is* an alternative: greater skill. I'm *trying*!)

In *A Small Civil War* — a story of book censorship in a small Iowa community — clearly I opt for the forces that believe reading is benefi-

cial, not harmful, to its practitioners. Reading *anything*.

When I was in college, for instance, my sister announced one evening at dinner that there was nothing in the house to read. She was under eleven at the time. I was dumbfounded. I challenged. Had she read Dickens? Yes. All of him. What about something more current, Nicholas Monsarrat's *The Cruel Sea*? Yes, that, too. Reaching even further, I grinned and asked about that season's salacious and notorious best-seller, *The Chapman Report*. She'd read that, as well.

Well!

The point is that as far as I can tell, her behavior was altered in no lubricious fashion after having read that book, nor do I think any child's would have been. It seems to me that unless and until you have personal experience with which to measure, reading such a book becomes an exercise in pure fiction — reading for the story alone. The sexual detailing, the needs and hungers of adult characters, are obscured by whether or not the story pulls you along.

As for *A Small Civil War*, the book that figures as target (as it did in reality) is *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Dutifully and slowly I reread the book, twice. Once in simple admiration and awe, for it is a giant. Again, underlining and counting the number of times certain "questionable" words or phrases are used in the text. The final tally *is* huge: on an average, there are more than two instances *per page* of what people, rightly or wrongly, consider bad language, unclean thought, imagery that is either corrupting or inciting. From a particular point of view, it is possible to see why the book might upset adults hoping to protect their young from the crudities and shocks of life in the thirties, as well as in the eighties. From my own point of view, however, it is still and always what the writer says, not the particular words or phrases in which he speaks, that matter. And what one remembers of *The Grapes of Wrath* is sadness and frustration, sympathy and strength. *And* a small amount of triumph, too, in lasting, in getting to California, in hoping to stay.

What Steinbeck did so brilliantly was to replicate the speech of a certain set of people, but very carefully. If anyone wants to take the time and trouble — you'll find that Ma Joad never, ever succumbs to language that could in any way be considered censorable, despite her travails. This, I assume, was a conscious choice of the artist. Ma Joad *wouldn't* swear. She doesn't need to. She has strength, belief, patience. And she's a leader. She has other, finer, stronger tools at her command.

I don't want to presume, but I think Mr. Steinbeck was propagandizing. He wanted readers to see the wretchedness of life on the road for his Okies. He wanted us to understand and sympathize. He wanted us to care for, learn from, remember. He had his villians, too — the forces that put the Joads out of their homestead, that drove them from temporary refuges along their route back out into the wilderness again. He wanted us to feel the injustice of all this. He succeeded.

What I wanted to do in *A Small Civil War* was smaller-scaled, but equally pointed. I wanted people on both sides of this issue to understand each other. There were safeguards and liberties both to be considered. People's feelings, as well as individual rights, were at stake. That in this case the "wrong side" won, alas, simply corresponds with life. But the important thing is to understand, to know where one would stand if faced with identical choices. I could only hope that most readers would, in the face of the temporary defeat in these pages, know it was temporary, know that it was an outcome that could be, must be changed.

I have also been criticized for too often selecting as a point of view that of a teen-aged girl, rather than a boy.

I accept that. (Still, what about *Edgar Allan, Touching, Sleep, Two, Three, Four!, Freddy's Book*?)

Some things in life don't seem to change much. One of them is the average reader for YA Books. It *is* a teen-aged girl: middle-class, curious, thoughtful.

If, as we so often say we believe, women are the gentling influence in life, then why not write directly to this audience? They are malleable, still; unformed and open. And if a liberal's concerns are ever to be presented and to have any sort of impact, at what better age? (That sounds unfair and manipulative. It is.)

What *has* changed, I think and hope, is the reader's and the publisher's willingness — nay, ability — to allow for the possibility that young people do not live in a vacuum in which no adult figures any more prominently than the knees of mothers and father in comic strips.

This was not always so. I began writing in 1968. At that time, the cardinal rule seemed to be that adults — if involved in a story at all — were to be marginal, generally well-meaning if a little blind, and were never, ever to receive equal focus or attention. Editors felt that young people wouldn't read a story in which adults figured too prominently. *Continued on page 40*

WORDS BY OUIDA SEBESTYEN

Beverly Haley, The Language Works, Fort Morgan, Colorado

"...Love your enemies and do good to those that hate you..."

The words that had been so beautiful to say, so easy, turned to stone. No one had told her, not Papa, not the preacher, tht they could change like that when they had to be lived, and crush her with their weight."

(*Words by Heart*, p. 148)

Lena Sills needed all the courage, all the desire, all the intelligence she possessed to win the Bible verse recitation contest. Everyone expected Winslow Starnes to take home first prize, but Lena longs to show them all. She, a girl and a black among whites, too poor for fancy clothes, risks her natural shyness, her pride, the possibility of failure — even exposes, through her choice of verses, her innermost private self — to win. And win she does, though the winning tastes like copper pennies when she bites into it. Humiliating as the contest is, the true test for Lena comes later when the meaning of those words so carefully memorized must be turned into actions. Lena wins again, but the pain of this victory cuts deep as the soul reaches — far deeper than the pain that had seemed so sharp in that first winning at the novel's opening.

Everything has its price. To gain something, you must lose something. And the dearer the prize, the greater the cost. Lena wins the Bible recitation contest, but she pays with her personal pride. And later, to gain her father's respect, she must force herself to bring those memorized words to life. "A price must be paid" recurs as a major theme in Ouida Sebestyen's novels — *Words By Heart*, *Far From Home*, and *IOU's*. Coming to her own success later in life than many authors (She told at a recent writers' workshop how it took her 30 years of trying and of growing to learn "to tell a story simply, truly."), Sebestyen's years of apprenticeship are now yielding awards-winning works. She tries, she says, to create a "sense of miraculous heroes. a sense of individual worth and potential." She wants her stories to show how things have been, how they ought to be, how they can be.

Sebestyen's characters provide the vehicle for dramatizing the themes. Family plays a central role in all three novels, but not family in the traditional sense. *Words By Heart* centers around a black family in an early 1900's all white Western town. Lena, the protagonist, idolizes her father Ben and loves her young stepmother, Claudie, half-brother Roy, half-sister Armilla, and the baby. Ben Sills, who once studied to be a minister, forms the strength and the center of the family; and he demands of his family that each one be at once strong and gentle.

Far From Home features a family menagerie. Again set earlier in this century, the story opens with the death of Salty Yeager's deaf-mute mother. Though he has never heard his mother's voice, he has known the strength of her penetrating love and the need to live up to that love. Now Salty must find a way to care for Mam, as he calls his great grandmother, and himself. But no one will hire Salty. Evicted from the small shack on a farm several miles from town, Salty must also get living quarters for himself, Mam, and Tollybosky, the pet gander he refuses to abandon. The last hope is The Buckley Arms Hotel, where his mother had worked hard and faithfully for as long as Salty knew. Tom and Babe Buckley — who own, run, and live in the shabby old hotel that looks "like a dignified bum who still thought it was somebody" reluctantly take the three in. Hardy McCaslin — who can't grow up, can't get or hold a job, just wants to have a good time — and his wife Rose Ann live there, too, as part of the hotel family. Briefly, the Buckleys also provide shelter for Jo Miller, who has run away from her irresponsible husband just when it is time for their first child's birth. Salty, who has never known who his father is, feels compelled, with his mother dead, to find the father he doesn't know.

The family in *IOU's*, a story set in the present in the Rocky Mountain foothills, consists only of mother and son, Annie and Stowe Garrett. Annie's father disowned her when she ran away to marry a man he disapproved of; her husband abandoned her when Stowe was very small to pursue a life of personal pleasure (Sebestyen's men tend to have weakness of character, though Ben Sills in *Words* makes up for all the

rest.) The conflict comes for Stowe when he learns that the grandfather he has never seen is dying and wants to see Stowe, but not Annie, before that moment. Stowe is torn between wanting to be loyal to his mother, hating both his grandfather and father for what they have done to Annie and him, and longing to see them, to know them, to let them into his life, to find other pieces to the puzzle of his identity. (The search for identity runs strong through both *Far From Home* and *IOU's*.

Reminiscent of Steinbeck's worlds, Sebestyen's protagonists suffer the effects of poverty, of being misfits, and of doing battle against the world in general and themselves in particular. Despite their lack of material wealth, Sebestyen's heroes gleam with a sense of nobility and purpose that the glimpses of those characters wealthy in possessions fail generally to reveal.

Their situations demand of each protagonist — Lena, Salty, Stowe — that they grow up prematurely. All experience a death in the family that forces additional maturity on them. This early maturing imposes pain, but it also endows them with a largeness of purpose and of character that most teenagers do not acquire in such breadth and depth. But they lack experience to help them fulfill the demands on them, so they sometimes falter in their attempts. Lena steals books from Mrs. Chism, justifying that act to herself and her father by saying,

> "I just wanted to read them...Books are to read. They'll just ruin up there (the attic). She don't care if the rats eat them — she's wasteful. She's ignorant and selfish." (p. 65)

Salty resents the burden that Mam is:

> He loved her. She was his roots, the gristle that tied him to those tintype faces in her keepsake box, all dim and blurry like the past. But right now, with his muscles bunched to hurry, her slowness and feebleness galled him like Hardy's handcuffs. He hated trying to understand her griefs and move at her speed and remember she was there, in the hustle of his life. But he walked behind the wagging hem of her dress, inch after inch, practicing for the unimaginable time when he would be like that. (p. 87)

Stowe, in *IOU's*, resents having to think about things instead of just doing them as his friend Brownie is free to do:

> *Think*, Annie was always telling him. He wished he could be like Brownie. Brownie didn't think. He did something. He would either have slammed the phone in the middle of Cousin Harold's conversation, or he'd be on the bus to Oklahoma now. None of this stupid hesitating. none of this flopping around trying to make the right decision. (p. 17)

Each of the protagonists discovers, too, the power to hurt others. Lena knows she has hurt her father by being dishonest:

> "You have robbed me," Papa said, rubbing his hands on his knees. "I trusted you. I would have stood up in court and sworn Miss Chism lent you books, because I knew you wouldn't take them otherwise. I want to trust you like that, Lena." (p. 66)

Salty recognizes this power to hurt others in this passage:

> He could hurt people. he had never had that kind of power before. He had lives in his hand. It scared him, in a way nothing else ever had. (p. 108)

Stowe deliberately uses his power to hurt his mother Annie:

> "...About your dad. Your dad doesn't want you. He wants me."
>
> She stood with the cake layers in her hands, blinking as if he had flung his fist at her again. (p. 135)

Just as Sebestyen dramatizes the irony that the materially rich may be poor in common sense and decency while the materially poor possess riches of other kinds, so too do the teenagers rise to become the adult when that role is demanded. Tom Buckley in *Far From Home* can love only one person. When Salty dresses in Tom's old military uniform for the home entertainment night, Tom explodes:

> Tom's amazed eyes raked him. He expected to feel the path of the gaze on his skin through the wool. "Get that thing out of my gut," Tom said. "You little scum."
>
> He couldn't move. Horror fell like shrapnel all around him. (pp. 147-8)

Salty, the teenager, must grow taller than Tom, the adult who can't love his own son. Salty is left alone, Sebestyen explains, "to find his place in a complex world, a safe, loving center."

In *Words*, Lena must be a bigger person than Mrs. Chism in that rich woman's irrational de-

mands; bigger than Mr. Starnes, who forbids his son Winslow to associate with the blackgirl (Later in the novel, Winslow becomes the adult when he calmly stands up for his friend Lena); and bigger than the Haneys, the poor white trash competing for Mrs. Chism's favors. When Lena's father dies, the preacher admits his inability to be the adult comforter of the child:

> ...He murmured, "What can I say to you, Lena? You know all the words already."
>
> Who comforted preachers? she wondered. (p. 156)

Throughout *IOU's*, Stowe attempts to protect his mother, to be a strength to her. Early in the novel he says

> "I want to make it up to my mother," he whispered. "Like paying her back for taking care of me and all, and showing me the fun instead of the bad parts...
>
> "...I want to make up for my father, too. She's stuck with me, so it's only fair for me to take his place. I've got to do a better job than they did, and provide for her, and make her happy, and you know, protect her and build up her confidence. So I've got to be mature and understand things and all like that. So I'm promising. Honor bright. I promise to give her what they didn't." (pp. 26-7)

Sebestyen's protagonists are spirited, independent teenagers bent on being better than they are now and better than others. They are honest, loyal, proud, and loving. Yet they could not be accused of being goody-goody. They flame orange-red in their passion to possess the best in life; they push; they lie; they use their power to hurt; they have their moments of despair. They are human beings trembling on the edge of adulthood who grow up through the events in their lives. They grow stronger as a result of adversity and the fact that they are misfits in society because of age, social class, race, or sex. And for those minor characters who are in most ways flabby and weak of will, there come small deeds or words to surprise the protagonist and the reader with redeeming traits.

Violence erupts — the knife driven through the loaf of bread on the Sillses' kitchen table, the mysterious death of the pet dog, the violation of human dignity because of racial prejudice in *Words;* jeers from neighbors, rejection by his own father, the loneliness of Jo in her birth-giving, the quarreling between Hardy and Rose Ann in *Home;* and in *IOU's* the humiliations of having to return part of the groceries at the checkout stand because Annie doesn't have enough money, the embarrassment of Brownie and Stowe making fools of themselves in their anger over Karla's growing up before they do and leaving them behind and out of her life, getting lost in the cave on the mountain campout. These and other violences are set in relief against the tenderness between people who love deeply and who fight for that love.

Sebestyen lightens the opposing tones of violence and of tenderness with a third tone — that of playfulness and an enduring sense of hope. The protagonists are, after all, children. One not merely hopes but believes they will never lose the child within that makes them laugh and be bold and believe in a happy ending somewhere, that takes delight in the joy of now.

We see this dual feeling of playfulness and of hope for Lena here:

> It was fun working all by herself...Lena felt elated — so strong and happy she could pick (cotton) forever. Two hundred pounds by noon. Watch their eyes pop when they saw how much.
>
> A band of crows from the river trees crossed overhead, grating like rusty wheels. She laughed up at them, wishing she could remember how the ragtime went. Caw. Quawk. Caw caw ca-caw. She cakewalked a few steps, snapping her fingers. Caw! (p. 96)

We catch that same sense of fun in Salty's part in the home entertainment scene:

> ...When they had made their final bow, Hardy fished a firecracker out of his pillow padding. Salty struck a match, and they froze, their hands almost touching.
>
> "Not in my parlor!" Babe scremed...
>
> They touched fuse and match. Flame sputtered in Hardy's hand, and with a bang, an explosion of little silvery stars fluttered down like snow over everybody...
>
> "You *rascals*!" Babe gasped, catching stars in her outstretched hands. (p. 146)

Something Stowe most thanks his mother for is the fun they make together and often with his friend Brownie (It's why Brownie envies Stowe — his parents don't have that gift to give him). On their way back to Annie's home, the two stop to picnic. A train approaches in the summer heat; they wave at the engineer but think he can't see them so they try the caboose:

> ...They could see the little doll-house cupola swaying along like the tuft at the end of a lion's tail.

Continued on page 13

TENACITY AND TALENT
An Interview with Dean Hughes

Norma Bagnall, Missouri Western State College

Dean Hughes has had many experiences which he brings to literature for children and young adults; he has been a missionary in Germany, a bell hop in a Seattle hotel, a professor of English at a midwestern university, and now he is a consultant teaching technical writing several days a month while he is also established as a full-time writer. He is also a very personable man who genuinely likes people of all ages.

I met Dean for the first time in Waco, Texas, at the annual Children's Literature Association conference in 1980. Dean had his first book published at that time; he had also published some poetry and a short story. Now, scarcely three years later, Dean has seven books published, two more in press, and is branching out into different genres. He shows every indication of steady, continuous growth.

Dean was on the Missouri Western State College campus in October where he met with our writing students and gave an address about young people's literature. I was particularly impressed with his response to people — both children and adults. He was interestted in their questions and comments, and there was much opportunity to discuss writing — creative, technical, and classroom. To each audience Dean brought a renewed respect for the craft of writing. I was also impressed with the way Dean talked about his books: where the ideas come from, how he develops the ideas, and how his characters frequently lead him to make statements he was not always aware he was going to make.

Dean's Missouri history trilogy follows the life of Joseph Williams from the time he is a rather young boy in *Under the Same Stars* (1980) and a son of Mormon pioneers in Missouri, through contentious teen-aged years where he worked on the Missouri River on a river boat in *As Wide as the River* (1981), and through a great many hardships as one of a minority ousted from the place they chose to live. The third book in that trilogy, *Facing the Enemy* (1982), makes a profound statement about how the evil we struggle against in other people is sometimes that same evil we find within ourselves.

Q *Dean, is this situation one that developed from the growth of Joseph Williams as a character, and if so, how did it come about?*

A I'm never quite certain how a literary idea "comes about." But I suppose, in this case, the concept *is* an evolution from the situation. Joseph Williams had known a great deal of hatred in his life — all directed at him from people outside his own group. The natural response for a child is to simplify the world, to see things in terms of "good guys" and "bad guys." It takes maturity, and often a forced realization, to understand that evil is never so neatly distributed.

So I guess the third book was destined to come to this point. Joseph was growing up. He was always on the rebellious side, always looking for answers to difficult questions. He couldn't help addressing this one sooner or later. Nor could the guy at the typewriter who was "creating" him — he's always been a little rebellious himself.

Q Hooper Haller *(1982) came later; it is a nifty idea to make him a contemporary descendant of Joseph Williams. How did that happen?*

A *Hooper Haller* was actually my first attempt at writing a book for young readers. At that point I was looking for advice and I got plenty of it — of varying qualities. Someone told me that sports novels were easy to sell. But I didn't want to do one of those "Oh, will they win the pennant?" kinds of books; I wanted to do one that probed a little at the nature of athletics and competition. Frankly, some of the rejections I received seemed to be saying: "Would you just give us the sports and not all this *human* stuff?"

So I put the book aside for a while. After I sold my first two historical novels to Deseret Book I hit on the idea of having my main character a descendant of Joseph Williams in those earlier books. That added another dimension, I felt. I also revised, with the help of the editorial staff,

am interested in the problems of a young man who reaches his goal in life by the time he is eighteen; in the problems that result when winning becomes everything; and in the ethics of sports. And, of course, I am interested in the relation of religious commitment to these other issues.

Q *Jenny is such a strong female in your story about Hooper, and I understand that she is going to be the protagonist in a new book.*

A *Jenny Haller* is the sequel that will soon be out. Jenny is one of my favorite characters. She is trying hard to decide whether she wants to go to law school or to marry Eldon Haller, the baseball player. She fears becoming "Mrs. Haller" and nothing more. I think her decision is interesting.

Q *What about* Switching Tracks *(1982); did the situation develop naturally from the friendship of your protagonist with the old man?*

A *Switching Tracks* came from a complex series of experiences and thoughts. I heard a teenaged boy yelling derisive remarks at an older man. I wondered why he would do that — but I also forced myself to analyze my own response to the aging process. Out of that thinking came the idea for a book about a friendship between a teenager and an older man. But frankly, that sounded a bit too much like "standard stuff."

The idea took a turn when I asked myself how the friendship started, concluded the boy's father was gone, and then decided that he had committed suicide. This added guilt and pain and complexity to the concept. Escape to an addiction to video games seemed a likely reaction by the boy. And it also helped me find a bridge to the older man.

Or something like that. What I'm giving you is an incredibly cheapened version of what to me is the most exciting part of literary creation: watching a novel form itself in my own head and then evolve on my typewriter. More than in my other books, *Switching Tracks* has whole chunks of me in it — things that welled up from my unconscious. I experienced that book with punishing pain — and with elation.

Q *I know you wrote your first novel when you were just out of high school. You say it was very bad and that you learned a lot. How was it bad? And how did you learn — did you get comments from editors; did you have to re-read it later and discover its badness on your own?*

A The book was terribly imitative (of J.D. Salinger), and it was what you would expect of someone that age: weak in almost all ways. But I had received very good training from my high school creative writing teacher, Wilson Thornley (one of the greatest men who ever walked this earth, as far as I'm concerned). I had been taught how to judge writing, and I could see what was wrong. The characters were weak, the style strained, the humor flat, etc.

What I received from the publisher was a standard rejection slip with no comments. I sat down and began to read the manuscript, however; and I couldn't even finish it. I never sent it out again.

Looking back, I'm amazed that I had the discipline to finish the project and, at the same time, the objectivity to judge it. I meet many young people with writing talent, but with no discipline and no humility. The fact is, in the long run, tenacity is more valuable than talent.

Q *Your master's degree is in creative writing. What effect has advanced academic work had on your writing?*

A I think it mainly gave me a full year of intense writing practice with excellent guidance from Markham Harris, a professor at the University of Washington. I had learned the "principles" of writing in high school, and from Gordon Allred at Weber State College. But I needed more practice, more development of basic skills.

And, of course, I still need that. I'm still trying to learn how to write. I'm appalled by the many people — especially the teachers — who seem to think writing is some sort of inspiration received automatically by "sensitive types." Writing is a craft. If you want to learn to play the piano, you take lessons and you practice like crazy. No one would take seriously a person's plan to be a concert pianist if that person were not working steadily and seriously with music. And yet, I meet people who say they want to be writers, and when I ask them what they're working on they say, "Oh, nothing right now. I have to be in a certain mood to write." It's as though "mood" were everything. The only way to learn to write — or really to finish a written work — is

to write consistently, and that means writing when you don't feel like it.

Q *Tell us something about your schedule for writing. I know you support a family, take time out for consulting work in cities throughout the United States; how do you schedule time for your writing?*

A Lately I've been traveling a great deal, working as a technical writing consultant and teacher. That interrupts any regular schedule I might prefer to have. But I force myself back into a routine just as fast as I can, when I return. I try to start at eight each morning. I usually don't stop for lunch, but I stop for the day at about two or three in the afternoon.

One thing I am able to do is get interrupted by the telephone or my kids, or whatever — maybe even run someone to a dance lesson or a soccer game — and come right back to work. The heart of writing is *finishing* the job, and that means painstaking revision. And that means putting in the hours and working consistently.

At eight every morning, by the way, I am *not* in the mood to write. I would rather do *anything* else. By nine every morning I feel sorry for people who do anything else for a living.

Q *Once you have sent a novel off, now that you are a published writer with two houses, what happens?*

A I get it back. And I write it again — and again. By the time my editors are finished with me, I can't stand the manuscript anymore. Jean Karl, at Atheneum, and Eleanor Knowles, at Deseret Book (and their staffs), are sticklers for "getting it right." I often rewrite three times or more, after *I* have first pronounced a book finished. (I hate this, and yet I bless those editors when the book finally comes out and the reviews are good and I'm proud of it.)

Millie Willenheimer and the Chestnut Corporation (in press) is a good example of this. I probably revised *Milie* as much as any book I have written. Jean Karl really helped me a great deal on it. I think we finally got the right tone, and some good humor. (Or at least I hope so. By the time I read my galleys I never like my books — but this one seemed to work pretty well.) I'm happy that the Junior Literary Guild has selected this one for their list — someone else apparently also thinks it works.

The other thing I do is suffer with the long wait. It usually takes a year to eighteen months for a book to appear. In the meantime I see the galleys and maybe a dust jacket or some art work — but mostly I wait. Of course, the secret is to keep lots of things in the pipe so that something is always coming out.

Q *Do publishers have much effect on how you shape a novel? That is, can they dictate to you the direction in which your story goes?*

A I would throw out the word "dictate," but yes, the editors are extremely important in shaping a manuscript. I would hate to do things I didn't believe in, just because an editor told me to, but this has never happened to me. I get excellent guidance from the editors I work with.

A writer needs a tough critic at some stage, and the editor who doesn't pour on constant praise, but who demands excellence, is crucial to the production of a good book. It is no accident that certain editors consistently publish fine writing — much of the work is their own.

It's also interesting to me that my editors don't talk much about "what will sell." The advice is artistic — how to strengthen the story, the characters, the writing style.

Q *Your children, I know from hearing you talk about them, are an important part of your life. You've also told me that they help you in your writing. Do they bring home stories of experiences that you can use in your writing? Are they instrumental in shaping your stories? How, exactly, do they help?*

A I don't remember getting an idea for a novel directly from one of my children's experiences. But having kids around helps me very much. I have a clear sense right now, for instance, of what a seventh-grade girl is up to: saying, wearing, worrying about, listening to, feeling, laughing about. I also have a boy in the ninth grade and another in the fourth. That's about right — high school, junior high, and elementary — now if they will just stay put for a few more years.

The other things my kids do is read my manuscripts and my finished books. I pay them to do it, and they have no stars in their eyes. They have gotten to be good critics. I have learned, however, that when a book is in the early drafts I don't want the really tough criticism an editor gives me. I think the kids sense that, and they give me plenty of praise. But I can tell what they genuinely like, and what they are being polite about. That helps me know how well I'm doing.

Q *Are you moving in the direction of writing more novels for young adults than for children?*

A I don't think so. Overall, I have written more books for young adults — but not by any design. What I mainly want to do is to write all kinds of things. I don't want to feel limited to one genre or one readership. Ideas don't come with age categories, but they come with a character in mind, who happens to have an age. I wish we would do less to categorize books. For instance, I don't think there are "books for boys" and "books for girls." Kids ought to read about each other. And adults who don't think they should read children's or adolescent literature are missing out on a great deal.

Q *You have told me that you wanted to be a writer even when you were a child. What were you writing then; what were you reading?*

A Before I had even started school, I used to scribble on paper and then ask my mother to read it back to me. I would get upset when she wouldn't read the "story" I had created in my head. I also wrote stories in school, and got serious about it in high school, where I published in our literary magazine.

I was also "hooked" on reading all through school. I read a lot of junk I'm sure, and I went through stages: dog stories, sci-fi, biography, etc. But when I was in high school I asked an English teacher for a list of "good books." We didn't use that horrible term "the classics" in those days. I started reading from that list, and I read nothing else for years. All through high school I was reading excellent novels: Russian, British, American. The truth is, I often skimmed or even ignored my assigned reading in *Ivanhoe* and the like; meanwhile I was reading *The Brothers Karamazov, War and Peace, Return of the Native, Wuthering Heights, The Grapes of Wrath, The Great Gatsby, Candide,* etc.

Q *There must be something immensely satisfying about having a shelf or two of books which you have authored; what other satisfactions are there in writing?*

A I started saying I wanted to be a writer when I was in junior high. Sometimes now I look up at those books on my shelf and say, "Hey, I am one." Few things have brought me that kind of satisfaction.

But as it turns out, the ego trips are few, and the disappointments seem to come more often. When I am out speaking and the kids and teachers and librarians treat me with such honor, I feel like an impostor — it's all too lovely to be deserved. But even the hint of the negative in a review really hurts me. The process of having your books become *known* is slow, sometimes almost more than I can stand.

That's not such a bad trade-off, I suppose, but it teaches me what I'm trying hard to learn: the joy in this trade simply *cannot* come from outside. A writer has to find the most joy in the act of creation, and in the freedom to do that creating — the outside response must not become all important.

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As Wide as the River, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1980. Second in the Mormon-Missouri series. In this one young Joseph reacts strongly to what he considers domination by his older brother Matthew, and he leaves home to work on a river boat on the Missouri River.

Nutty for President, NY: Atheneum, 1981. Nutty Nutsell is a fifth grader, and when William Bilks comes to his school — looking like a nurd — Nutty has no idea William is going to change his life. He gets Nutty to run for Student Council President, even though that position traditionally went to a sixth grader, and the kids found out that William had a way around adults that allowed him to do pretty much as he pleased.

Honestly, Myron, NY: Atheneum, 1982. This one is set in Washington State. Myron has made a

vow to tell the truth at all costs, but he finds himself running afoul of parents, teachers, and finally the media when he does.

Hooper Haller, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1982. Hooper is the small town that Eldon Haller comes from in Utah. He has been signed by the Kansas City Royals to pitch, and he is not quite eighteen years old. He has to face big city reporters who seem to wait for him to make a mistake, and he also has to accept good natured ribbing from the team members.

Facing the Enemy, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1982. Third in the Mormon-Missouri history. Joseph and his family are once more forced to leave the area where they have had success farming and settling. This book takes them from Missouri back into Illinois.

Jenny Haller (in press). A sequel to Hooper Haller; young Jenny struggles with her own need for identity as a woman and as a Mormon.

Millie Willenheimer and the Chestnut Corporation (in press) is a story for middle-graders and deals with a social issue; this time the issue is the basic ethic behind capitalism. I look for humor like that in *Nutty* and *Myron* for Hughes to discuss a serious subject.

Sebestyen — continued from page 6

> "I see somebody up there," Stowe said. They waved gleefully at the staring head in the window as the caboose lumbered by.
>
> "We must have looked like two Mexican jumping beans in the road," Annie laughed. (p. 156)

The train labors to a halt, thinks they're signalling for help. Annie can't believe it. They apologize to the man, horrified at what they've done. Stowe is embarrassed. But Annie says, with a stillness in her face, "Imagine...It stopped. A whole train stopped, just to help us. How perfectly ridiculous and wonderful." (p. 157)

The author's diction captures the flavor of a time, a place, and particular people. Its poetic, musical simplicity elevates the people who are poor materially to match their richness of character. Wealthy Mrs. Chism, on the other hand, reveals her baseness of character through her "back-of-the-barn" language. Thus diction and style add texture to the writer's use of force/counterforce in characters, themes, and events.

Sebestyen's aim beyond telling a story is, she says, to nourish and enlarge young minds. Those of any age who read her words risk catching the fire of life as Salty does at the close of *Far From Home*:

> He took his punk stick from between his knees and touched it to a Sphinx. A flame rose, as green as love, and burst into sparks, snow, goose down, tears — he wasn't sure which. But it was for everything that was his, out there.
>
> Quickly he groped in the box and put his punk to a sparkle stick. The gray-coated wire flickered and faded, unable to catch. Then sparkles burst from the grayness, flying, hot against his skin. He stood up, so Idalee could see from her window, and conducted a band of chimneys. He made a great charmed circle over the Buckley Arms, and wrote his name in light. (p. 191)

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THE EVOLUTION OF A SYLLABUS: ADOLESCENT LITERATURE

Susan M. Nugent, Keene State College

Should college adolescent literature courses emphasize approaches to teaching literature or the study of literature itself? Each semester I ask myself this question when revising and updating my syllabus. I am concerned that a recent survey of adolescent literature courses taught in colleges (Abrahamson. *English Education,* December 1981) indicates that many class activities and objectives in the college courses throughout the country are oriented toward the methods of teaching adolescent literature. Many college courses devote much time to how these novels might be used with adolescents in classroom situations, while the course I now teach emphasizes examination of novels, poetry, short stories, plays, and non-fiction as literature. Despite this current difference, when I first taught adolescent literature it was a course primarily designed for in-service teachers; thus, my original syllabus emphasized methods of teaching literature. While designing my 1983 syllabus, I considered the changes made in the course since 1979. Four years of student evaluations, department meetings, conferences, and professional and literary readings surfaced to remind me of the why's behind the changes.

I have made three major revisions since originally teaching the course. These reformulations came chronologically: an increased emphasis on the study of literature, a revised reading list incorporating several types of adolescent literature, and an in-depth examination of the transition theory.

First, the course has developed into a course in which methods for the teaching of literature take a secondary or even a minor role, depending on the student. This decision was in response to student evaluations and department concerns. The 1979 summer class was filled with junior and senior high school teachers who enjoyed the original methodological orientation of the course.

The second year of teaching adolescent literature brought a different perspective toward unit and lesson plan assignments. Student evaluations contained one comment worded in many ways, "Is this a literature course or an education course? You must decide which you want to teach." Shortly after I read this set of evaluations, the department also decided to question whether or not adolescent literature belonged in the discipline of English. While I was well prepared for my response to the question, I found myself examining my syllabus to discover why the issue had been raised. The answer was there; little of my syllabus indicated that anyone other than adolescents would find this literature worth studying.

Out came the typewriter and rewrites of the syllabus started. I scratched presentations on methods of teaching literature and emphasized the study of literature. Assigned lesson plans were deleted and archetypal, psychological, and sociological criticism was added. But I was reluctant to abandon the pedagogical activities. One more rewrite resulted in making several assignment options available for students. Thus, this semester student papers range from an archetypal examination of the quest theme in selected fantasies to a unit plan on science fiction. While the emphasis in class is now on literature, supplemental readings and alternative activities provide opportunity for application to the high school classroom.

The response of students in the class this semester has been worth the revision. To see juniors and seniors in college grappling with substantive ideas of man's confrontation with loss of innocence in such novels as *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and *The Man Without a Face* is indication enough that this literature is worth studying. In addition, the discovery that these students had not previously utilized archetypal, sociological, or psychological criticism proved helpful in revising the course. Subsequent attention to this approach added another dimension to *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld* and *Jacob Have I Loved,* as well as to the movies "Breaking Away," "My Brilliant Career," and "The Last Unicorn."

The second major revision in the syllabus involved the literature used in the course. My original list of novels was primarily composed of "the problem novel." Subsequently all genre were included in required readings. That

change was made in terms of adding non-fiction and drama. (My on-going search for selections of non-fiction, short stories, and drama makes me realize why most college courses focus on the novel.) Students had more suggestions: ethnic literature, fantasy, and science fiction. Now, as a result of the various input, only two novels remain from the original syllabus: Cormier's *The Chocolate War* and Wersba's *Run Softly, Go Fast.* Students have frequently requested that *The Chocolate War* be replaced with another novel because the book is deeply disturbing. However, it is this very factor that convinces me to keep it on the required reading list. On the other hand, a novel like Wersba's *Run Softly, Go Fast* gives juniors and seniors in college the opportunity to view adolescence through the eyes of a protagonist of their own age. For many students, this book provides insight into their stage of adolescence.

In addition to the English Department's suggestions, professional readings and conferences were influences in choosing varied titles for the adolescent literature course. Two issues of *Arizona English Bulletin* (April 1972 and April 1976) as well as many other resources repeatedly emphasized the need to expand the study of adolescent literature beyond the problem novel. Fantasy and science fiction are often not included in courses on adolescent literature. At a conference I attended, Jane Yolen humorously shed light on the situation. She referred to the three cycles of adolescent literature: the Arthurian cycle, the menstrual cycle, and the motorcycle. Her point was that too often adolescent literature deals with only the latter two cycles. She was certainly on target in terms of my original syllabus as well as lists describing other courses. Journals and conferences provided another impetus for changing the required readings on my syllabus.

As a result of this reformulation, the 1983 required literature is as follows:

Novels:
Cormier, Robert. *The Chocolate War.*
Holland, Isabelle. *The Man Without a Face.*
McKillip, Patricia. *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld.*
Paterson, Katherine. *Jacob Have I Loved.*
Speare, Elizabeth. *The Witch of Blackbird Pond.*
Taylor, Mildred. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry.*
Wersba, Barbara. *Run Softly, Go Fast.*

Poetry:
Dunning, Stephen, et. al. *Refletions on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle*
Peck, Richard. *Pictures that Storm Inside My Head.*

Drama and Movies:
Beagle, Peter. *The Last Unicorn.*
Hinton, S.E. *Tex.*
Zindel, Paul. "The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds."

Non-Fiction:
Lund, Doris. *Eric.*

Individual reports throughout the semester provide still more variety to these readings. Each student will undertake an intensive study of an author's style, themes, and purpose. One learner may choose Virginia Hamilton, gaining insight into black experience, while another may examine the stylistic variations of Maia Wojciechowska. Selected topics for a major paper give students the freedom to explore various aspects of literature. Last semester one student examined the treatment of minorities in adolescent literature while another compared Wersba's and Salinger's anti-heroes.

The third major change within the syllabus involves increased attention to the transition theory. The essential question in this theory is how adolescent literature can provide a transition into more complicated literature. A heuristic for the transition theory includes the following questions:

What literature has thematic similarities to this piece? Stylistic similarities?

How might these pieces be sequenced?

Which selection best introduces the theme or style?

Which one is most difficult to understand?

A number of activities are utilized to help focus on materials that would most beneficially introduce and follow the novel, poem, or play being studied. For example, when students write an analysis of a novel, they include a section suggesting literature that could precede or follow the one being discussed. Each analytical critique is xeroxed. In a class of thirty students, each writing three evaluations, ninety novels are analyzed with ninety examples of ideas for transition available for class reference.

Although this attention to the transition theory indicates a concern for methods of teaching literature, it also serves another purpose: This theory emphasizes the role of adolescent literature in reading development. College students are still developing as readers and can explore universal themes addressed in good adolescent literature. These students, like readers of any age, do not stop considering a particular theme

after finishing one book. For example, after reading Cormier's *The Chocolate War*, students can continue confronting these issues by reading Ibsen's "Enemy of the People." Another possibility, as one of my former students pointed out, could be Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist*. This student of adolescent literature took a seminar on Joyce the following semester. Meeting me in the hallway, she commented, "*Chocolate War* really prepared me for studying Joyce." Adolescent literature often provides the much needed link to adult literature.

The transition theory also allows students the opportunity to examine literary techniques and evaluate their use. Stream of consciousness in Wersba's *Run Softly, Go Fast* is much easier to understand than in Joyce's *Ulysses*. Flashback in Swarthout's *Bless the Beasts and Children* can prepare students for its more sophisticated use as in the recent novel and movie, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. An examination of adolescent literature makes techniques more accessible and applicable, and analysis more fruitful for students at every level. Thus, while the transition theory is important for the teaching of literature, it is also relevant to the study of literature.

The evolution of a syllabus does not stop. Rather, with each semester, changes take place. Topics for group reports will differ from semester to semester (e.g. the Moral Majority's effect on adolescent literature, or insights from developmental psychology applied to literature) just as the titles of the literature change. The focus of the course will remain on adolescent literature. This genre is still in its own youth with many changes inherent as it comes of age. With its development will come other approaches to adolescent literature — each one reacting to, but building on previous approaches.

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READING INTERESTS IN THE PANHANDLE OF NEBRASKA

Duane Grimme, Chadron State College

Thorndike, Richards, Norvell, Rosenblatt, LaBrant, Early, Taba, Burton, Loban, Squire, Purves, Carlsen, Applebee, Donelson, Nilsen, and Hipple are prominent names among those who have worked extensively identifying what youngsters read and relating those reading habits to variables influencing the reading act itself. Purveyors of books over time and places seem caught up in the kinds of things read and the various connections a reader makes with a work. Many books lists and response descriptions continue to provide classroom teachers and librarians choices in assembling reading materials and techniques.

The purpose of the study described here was to explore again the interests of readers, to extend those fascinations and curiosities of the "what's," "where's," and "how's" of reading to a region of the Upper Mid-West, and, by implication, to encourage a continuous examination of the reading materials and techniques in the curriculum designs, libraries, and classrooms of those participating schools.

The seven schools participating are located along the North Platte River in Western Nebraska. Those schools range in size from one with approximately 35 students in grades 10-12 to another with close to 800 senior high students. With all the schools and language arts classes from grades 10-12 responding to a questionnaire, 1650 student responses were tabulated, while 29 teacher and librarian responses were processed. The student total represented all those in attendance the day the questionnaire was given. All the student, teacher, and librarian tallies represented better than ninety percent of the total enrollments of the classes surveyed.

During a prescribed week, the secondary students, the secondary language arts teachers, and the librarians were asked to recommend books. The students recommended books to their fellow classmates; the teachers and librarians listed books worthy of use in a senior high reading program. The study also asked those same students and teachers to rank responses to literature according to the values they saw in a worthwhile reading experience.

Within the ten titles most frequently recommended, students showed a strong interest in the horror experience, in such books as *Amityville Horror* (165)*, *The Shining* (113), *Flowers in the Attic* (78), and *Jaws* (74). Most in that same lot of ten most recommended books are those with film corollaries, i.e., *The Amityville Horror* and *The Shining*. Four of the top ten are usually considered standards, i.e., *Animal Farm* (102), *Lord of the Flies* (73), *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (69), and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (66). The book that topped all reading interests is *The Outsiders* (196).

Of those books mentioned at least ten times, the most outstanding influence seems to be film itself. In the 137 book titles that made that frequency-of-ten list, nearly one half are associated with some form of film, forms ranging from film classics such as "A Tale of Two Cities" and "Shane" to the more contemporary marquee productions of "Kramer vs. Kramer" and "Ice Castles." It seems, also, that classroom instruction was related to reading choices; students listed many classical titles which are commonly taught, such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Scarlet Letter* along with the more contemporary *The Outsiders* and *The Pigman*. It is apparent, however, that the students favored the older books. Books by such authors as Scoppettone, Mazer, Lipsyte, Hamilton, Le Guin, Holland, Greene, Duncan, Cormier, Donovan, Peck, and Bridgers are noticeably few in the number frequency of this study.

Though students mentioned similar books frequently, they also cited numerous titles unique to their own personal tastes in reading. In all the 2,814 books listed, students indicated with single preferences 2,050 separate titles, everything from *The Apple Dumpling Gang* to *Walden*. There seems no apparent pattern here; just various tastes at work, seemingly, a force as valid in rendering a reading list as the communal interests of the film and taught classics.

* The numbers within parenthesis refer to the frequencies students listed titles in the "top ten."

Like the students, the teachers included an insignificant number of adolescent novels. In both the teacher and librarian lists are few books of horror and few film-related books, book types which appear heavily in the students' list. A comparison of those books listed by teachers and students and then by librarians indicates that the librarians were stronger advocates of the contemporary adolescent and popular book than were English teachers. The seven librarians listed titles with popular adult and contemporary adolescent appeal, titles such as *Centennial, Across Five Aprils, Chesapeake, The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, My Brother Sam Is Dead, The Pigman's Legacy,* and *Tex.* The teachers headed their recommendations with the old classics of *The Grapes of Wrath, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Scarlet Letter,* and *To Kill a Mockingbird.* Later in the list, the teachers did include some adolescent novels but ones which have been around awhile, such as *The Outsiders, The Pigman, The Catcher in the Rye,* and *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden.*

Perhaps the differences in recommendations is in some way related to the differing roles assumed by librarians and classroom teachers. The librarian's major concern is often with providing numerous choices, old and new, to satisfy the varying tastes of the entire student population. That librarian must constantly examine book lists and reviews, searching for titles which will satisfy the curiosities of pleasure reading more than accommodating the conventional assignments of the classroom. The language arts teacher is often preoccupied with what he or she has been taught as a quality literary experience, one that is often filled with universalities, critical perceptions, the classics, and small enrollments. Whatever the enthusiasms prompting the adult groups in this study to list books with differing profiles, it seems apparent that the students were more influenced by their teachers' choices than by their librarians' tastes.

The book lists for each separate school suggest little else not already mentioned; students apparently were moved by books of horror and by books related to the film. The students in each school, however, did place at the top of their own lists titles distinct to their own respective schools; on the separate lists for each school and reigning with some distinction were the following: *Lord of the Flies, Amityville Horror, Of Mice and Men, Brian's Song, My Antonia, Centennial, Where the Lilies Bloom,* and *The Outsiders.* Yet, there was enough agreement in choices from school to school to cause lengthy lists of similar titles and high frequencies. The same conclusion can be made of those lists regardless of school size. While some titles were distinctive of each school, the obvious tendencies were to like similar things. There was remarkable agreement in what the total student populations said at the various sophomore, junior, and senior levels; all three levels suggested with equal fervor *The Outsiders* and *Amityville Horror* as their two top books; all three levels listed frequently and similarly titles of the classic and film setting, a result which seems to negate any hierarchy of reading interests in grades 10-12, at least for the schools in this study. Only when the frequency of suggestion became singular did the titles become numerous and distinct, still with no apparent trend, just personal taste at work.

The results of this study do confirm those of other recent surveys. Surveys by William T. Ojala[1] and Joanne V. McKenzie[2] both described title listings heavily related to the media world and, also, listings of great diversity and various tastes. As well, both Ojala and McKenzie identified the most popular category of interest as that of the shocker, the wierd, the suspenseful. Deborah Ann Stachelek, in a survey of twelfth-grade reading interests, determined a wide variety of response, for her entire student population and then by sex difference.[3] However, this writer could not confirm Stachelek's conclusion that the students' avid reading interests largely excluded the traditional classic. In soliciting title recommendations from adults, Ken Donelson found that selected junior and senior high school teachers and college methods teachers from across the nation listed far more books typical of the adolescent genre than what this study seems to indicate.[4]

Within the range of responses tabulated in this study, this writer also identified and tabulated suggestions to reading other than titles of books as such. At the top of this category was the "none" response, a dramatic comment on reading for some students. Out of the total population queried, eighty-eight students (5.3%) offered "none" to the request for book titles; thirty-seven, *The Martian Chronicles* (a series); twenty-five, the author Louis L'Amour; and twenty-three, Laura Ingalls Wilder. From there on, the succession of responses produced numerous other series, authors, plays, magazines as well as comments such as "I don't read." All in all, there were 419 suggestions to reading other than book titles; unfortunately, in most instances, each of these suggestions represents a total student response, a figure which accounts for about one

fourth of the total population examined. However, the teachers and librarians erred not in the "miscellaneous;" rather, they diligently listed titles true to their understandings of the reading world.

The second part of the study, and perhaps the most important part, solicited response patterns characteristic of a reader's relationship to a book. Students were asked to reflect on how extensively they practiced such things in reading as telling facts (narrational), identifying in personal ways with the experiences of a book (self-involvement), relating parts of a story to their community and the larger world (associational), putting meaning to the story (interpretational), placing a worth or merit on the events of a work (valuing), anticipating what characters may do in circumstances different from the story (prescribing), and judging an author and his technique (literary). For each relationship, students chose from among "always," "sometimes," "seldom," or "never." Further, students were asked to rank these literary relationships on a scale from one to seven (seven being the least important).

The response trends of the total population indicate that students place the task of putting some meaning to the story (interpretational) at the top of their literary interests. Following closely and nearly equally in importance are the choices of identifying in personal ways with the events of a book (self-involvement) and of being able to cite the facts of a work (narrational). Relating the world of the book to real life (associational) and placing a personal and social merit on book events (valuing) run close thirds in the students' assessment of worthwhile reading. Critically judging a work (literary) and seeing how characters may act outside the book world (prescriptive) appear least important to the students. As the students marked the above relationships in a reading experience, so they ranked those practices numerically, ranking the "interpretational" relationship the most worthy and the "literary" response, the least important, rankings which agree with the earlier checks students gave to those reading relationships.

In filling out the same questionnaire, the teachers, however, were not as consistent as the students between the checks of importance extended to the reader/work relationships and the rankings (the numbered hierarchy) they ascribed to those relationships. The teachers checked the practices of learning the facts of a work, interpreting those events, and critically viewing literature as frequent and prominent acts in a good reading relationship; however, they ranked the importance of those practices or acts in a 5, 1, 6 order (one the most important). The teachers, however, may well be justified seeing that regular and frequent practice of something is not necessarily indicative of its literary worth, a relationship the students may not have had time or experience to develop. As a second contrast to the students' markings and rankings, the teachers chose the "seldom" and "never" categories much less frequently. With only five librarians indicating their literary responses, little can be said of trends and differences here.

The differences in the testimonies and rankings of the reading responses on the questionnaire reflective of class levels within one school as well as reflective of class levels and school sizes within *all* schools participating in the study seem insignificant. In distinguishing the population by sex, there was much unanimity. In the degrees of that claim, however, the girls seemed more positive and forceful about their reading experiences, checking more frequently the "always" and "sometimes" categories than the boys' enthusiasm showed.

The terms used in this survey to describe relationships a reader may have with a book are not new. Squire, Weiss, Purves, Rippere, Grindstaff, Applebee are prominent names among those who have articulated relationships readers have with books. In collating and summarizing descriptions various researchers have given to the literary response, Arthur Applebee observed that the various studies on literary response elements and patterns do identify a shift from a pre-adolescent narrational and content response to an adolescent response filled with interpretations, a move in time and age from the basic literal response to the interpretive one.[5] As already indicated, the high school readers of this study favored making some sense of a work, interpreting not only in personal ways but in social ways as well. The teachers and librarians seemed inclined not only to make some sense of a work but also to give it some aesthetic perspective. Aside from the interest in the response relationships and what those may say to the reading act, another significant side to the validity of the survey described here may lie in the attempt to get readers momentarily reflecting not only on *what* they are reading but on the *how* as well.

Necessarily, there were some limitations of this study. First, it is difficult to create contexts of response where all students would freely and genuinely speak of reading interests.

The presence of a teacher and immediacy of a classroom setting both may bias a student's freedom in choosing and recommending titles. The restriction of that recommending process to one moment itself certainly affords no more information than what a respondent is inclined to give at the time. In coding titles, anything that had some book-form credibility, i.e., "Julius Caesar," was accepted. Also, the success of asking the respondents to relate reading responses hinged upon the intelligibility and appeal of the response terms themselves. Although this researcher relied on existing terms and couched those responses in a language intended for the novice, the basic nature of a reading "response" requires a sophisticated act of assessing self, an at which may be beyond some youngsters.

In spite of these limitations, conclusive enough are the students' focal interests on books of horror, books related to films, and certain classics taught in the classroom; conclusive enough are the teacher's flair for the classics and the librarians' enthusiasms for more contemporary adolescent literature. Though the study showed little difference in the compilation of title data among class grade levels, school size, etc., no attempt was made to identify particular reading preferences by sex.

In attempting to identify reading relationships, this researcher concludes that students, teachers, and librarians are probably closer in thought than first appears. All three groups place at or near the top of their reading interest "narrating," "relating in personal ways," and "interpreting a given work." Like the students, the teachers and librarians ranked "critically juding a work" as one of the least important of the realities reading affords, even though this same group of teachers and librarians admitted to juding a work far more frequently than the students. Perhaps the real value of this study lies in the process. Simply raising the level of consciousness about reading can be reason enough to investigate reading interests.

References

[1]William T. Ohala, "A Survey of Adolescent Interests in Three Schools," *Arizona English Bulletin*, 12 (April, 1972), pp. 96-108.

[2]Joanne V. McKenzie, "A Survey of Leisure Time Reading of Adolescents," *Arizona English Bulletin*, 18 (April, 1976), pp. 13-22.

[3]Deborah Ann Stachelek, *A Comparative Study of the Reading Interests and Habits of Grade 12 Students in Selected Canadian and American Schools*, (ERIC ED 141 793), p. 23.

[4]Ken Donelson, "Some Recommended Adolescent and Adult Novels," *Arizona English Bulletin*, 18 (April, 1976), pp. 6-10.

[5]Arthur Applebee, "ERIC/RCS Report: The Elements of Response to a Literary Work: What We have Learned," *Research in the Teaching of English*, 2 (Winter, 1977), pp. 255-264.

GRAPHIC ART WORKSHOP SCHEDULED IN IOWA

"Graphic Art in Books for Children and Adolescents" is the title of a workshop to be offered this summer by The University of Iowa School of Library Science in Iowa City, IA. This workshop will begin Thursday evening, June 16, and run through Saturday, June 18.

Dr. Patricia Cianciolo, Professor of Children's Literature at Michigan State University and author of *Illustrations in Children's Books* (Wm. C. Brown, 1976) and *Picture Books for Children* (ALA, 1981), will be the guest lecturer. One semester hour of credit will be available ($53,00). Those taking the course for credit will be required to submit a paper or project related to some aspect of book illustration for children and/or adolescents.

For more information write or call School of Library Science, The University of Iowa, 3087 Library, Iowa City, IA 52242; Telephone: 319-353-3644.

BEYOND BOOKS
MEDIA FOR THE CLASSROOM

Dan Ward, Georgia State Department of Education

Several years ago I stumbled onto the secret for doing a column like this. A friend who had a similar responsibility phoned. He wanted me to review a work for his column. I was flattered but not totally naive. I asked "Why me?" My friend explained that the material dealt with media and since I knew more about media than anyone else that he knew...why, I'd be just perfect. "Flattered" joined "naive" in its conspicuous absence. You don't need to be from Buffalo to recognize a "snow job," and the one my friend was laying in would have been enough to ruin the peach crop in fourteen middle Georgia counties.

What I learned from that experience has made my life in the bureaucracy more comfortable. It takes "you" much less time to get "your" work done *if* you get "someone else" to do it. Naturally, I was delighted when three contributions from teachers for this column arrived in the mail, particularly since the reviews were good and I was busy with income tax and Guy Ellis wanted my overdue copy. I am indebited to Ms. Allene Johnson (Albany High School), Ms. JoAnn Lane (Dougherty High School) and Mr. James T. Yates (Dougherty High School) for their contributions.

I am not a science fiction fan, but "All Summer in a Day" makes me wonder, "Have I misunderstood Ray Bradbury?" Though some critics insist Bradbury is not simple a sci-fi writer, I have always believed him to be just that. However, I give this one to the critics. There is much more to his short story than a tale of far-away planets, silicon space beings, moon men, or fingers that glow in the dark.

Bradbury develops a touching story of innocence and children in very real situations. Margot and her classmates are impatiently awaiting the sun. There have been nine years of steady rain and none of Margot's classmates remembers the sun. They are too young, but Margot was born on earth and she remembers. In class the youngsters draw pictures of the sun, and Margot's picture is the most accurate. The teacher gives Margot special attention. She asks Margot to express her feelings about the sun, and she shows the class Margot's drawing. Margot's rival, William, hides his poor drawing, resenting the attention Margot is receiving. In retaliation William traps Margot in a storage room and bolts the door.

The rain ceases; the sun appears; and the class forgets Margot. The sun thrills the students who venture outside and recklessly abandon themselves to the warmth, the greeness, and the flowers that emerge to the sudden brilliance. Margot, forgotten in the morbid storage room, sees only a streak of sunlight through a crack in the door. She tries to capture it in her hand, but it is soon gone.

When William returns and remembers Margot, he is ashamed. He offers Margot the blossoms he has gathered, but she rejects him. After accepting flowers from each of the other students, Margot reconsiders William's gesture. She is compassionate and forgives, accepting his flowers, too.

Now that's real! Bradbury's children are alternately generous and greedy, cruel and kind. The surface simplicity opens to reveal a range of human weakness and strength; envy, revenge, compassion and forgiveness — universal emotions — are displayed. The setting *is* a distant planet and another time but the children are not; they're right out of the school yard of Pokenoe Middle School.

The filmmaker uses darkness and light skillfully. The film has an appropriate, over-all dreary look, the look of nine years of rain. Interior closeups are juxtaposed with the exterior cuts of dripping, saturated surfaces. The result is a startling contrast and back drop for the sharp brilliance of the brief period of sun. The end result enhances the event and deepens the despair of the trapped Margot. The film's power is such that you feel at its end that you must check the window to be sure it's not really raining.

The film offers good opportunities for classroom discussions of motivations, behaviors, characterization and symbolism. Students respond positively to the challenge of interpreting the various elements, their interrelationships, and their overall contribution to the work.

Companions for study include Bradbury's

"Dandelion Wine" (another view of summer time, flower gathering, and overcoming winter's miseries), James Thurber's little parable "The Last Flower," and the Norman McLaren film "Neighbors." The themes of each are complementary and offer interesting similarities as well as variations.

The film is short enough to view, discuss and begin additional study or reading within the same period. It is worth considering as an addition to the media collection. —*Allene Johnson*

Ray Bradbury's "All Summer in a Day" fr. Learning Corporation of America, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019; (212) 397-9330; (Sale: $550 16mm, $425 video. Rent: $50)

Irony is the major source of humor in Learning Corporation's adaptation of Damon Runyan's "Butch Minds the Baby." The title suggests an older brother who must stay home and mind an infant sibling. Not so — Butch is a three-time loser, a convicted safecracker, and the father. Butch's strong-willed "ole lady," Mary, declares a night out with friends for herself at her favorite diversion — a neighborhood wake. John Ignatius, Jr. is left in the charge of John Ignatius, Sr. Even the name offers ironic possibilities since Butch is hardly the saint or the scholar of the Jesuits' patron; but Butch does possess a natural savvy, a relative innocence, and a liberal helping of the old "blarney," all of which enables him to outsmart both the "hoods" who draw him from retirement and the police who threaten the perfect heist. John Ignatius, Jr. becomes Butch's accomplice and savior; he diverts the police and provides a perfect cover for the loot and the safecracker. No crook walks from the crime with babe in arms.

Butch and Jr. run away with the film and leave in their wake dumb flatfoots, inept ethnic hoods, and a wimpy contact man. Casting of father and son is excellent; they are a new, dynamic duo. Butch is the brawny Irishman, large, good natured, simple minded. Jr. is homely and bug-eyed, kicking, cooing and crawling at times *au naturel*.

Careful attention to detail produces an aura of authenticity with London of the 1980's in for New York of the 1930's. Light and shadow is used effectively to create mood while jazz music lightens and brightens a dark deed and a dark time. Butch's success against great odds and forces, like the business, criminal, and judicial worlds, offers numerous thematic possibilities for classroom consideration. His is an interesting antidote to the depression.

Students react favorably to the film for the most part. Some subtleties are lost to a general unfamiliarity with the era and the locale. Students would profit from some class time given to background information before viewing. Many students rejected the idea of a narrator telling the story as opposed to the actors revealing the events themselves; this situation provided an opportunity to consider style and discuss narrative technique.

Other stories that may be used in conjunction with "Butch..." include Fitzgerald's "Bernice Bobs her Hair" and Anderson's "I'm a Fool." Both are widely anthologized and are also available in film versions. O'Henry's short stories offer possibilities for comparison as do those of contemporaries like Ring Lardner. —*JoAnn Lane*

Damon Runyan's "Butch Minds the Baby" fr. Learning Corporation of America, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019; (212) 397-9330; (Sale: $550 16mm, $425 video/ Rent: $50)

The "free day—day off" stigma of classroom film abuse makes me a rare user of media, but Learning Corporation's adaptation of "The Cop and the Anthem" was a worthwhile departure. The filmmaker recreates O'Henry's short story to a ragtime beat with a nickelodeon sound. Soapy (Robert Morse) is a doomed hobo. He seeks incarceration for the winter with all the "bennies" of a municipal guest at the Blackwell Island Jail, namely, food, warm shelter, and clean bedding. From the outset, Soapy fails at self-incrimination, and his failure yields a montage of eccentrics...a red stockinged hooker, a park bench octogenarian, and a seemingly typical businessman with a weakness for petty theft. Each encounter offers Soapy opportunity for the desired imprisonment; each opportunity is lost. Soapy remains lamentably free. "What's an honest bum got to do to get pinched?"

The filmmaker is meticulous in reproducing the ambiance of turn-of-the-century New York. Opening, orienting shots are monocromatic stills which establish mood and time, 1904. Authentic costumes and sets sustain and enhance that mood. This fineness of detail is most obvious at Chez Pierre's where Soapy, in stolen and makeshift attire, dines on pheasant at a linen covered table...fine china, crystal, real silver and flower decked. Soapy's goal is justice, the fate of all deadbeats, i.e., arrest and gaol; instead, Soapy is ignominously ejected. "What's an honest bum got to do to get pinched?"

Student response was positive and profitable. Their comments ranged from "cute" to

"clever" to "a must for all kids." One enthusiast wanted it included in the curriculum for all the high schools. My resident rebel found Soapy admirable and the properly attired representative of right society loathsome. These views and observations initiated student discussion: diverse interpretations and opinions followed without prompting or hesitation. This film motivates discussion and has obvious value. It can be grouped with other works such as Lardner's "Haircut," West's *A Cool Million*, Anderson's *Winesburg Ohio*, and Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" to create a unit on irony. It can be combined with works that parallel the period or the humor. Or it can stand on its own merits as a good film adaptation. —*James T. Yates*

O'Henry's "The Cop and the Anthem" fr. Learning Corporation of America 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10019; (212) 397-9330; (Sale: $550 16 mm, $425 video/ Rent: $50)

Each of the LCA films reviewed above and in the previous issue of ALAN are from LCA's new short story library for which a discount is offered on purchases of four or more. It's worth keeping in mind considering the kind of budgets most of us are working with these days.

On a final and totally serious note, I want to acknowledge the assistance of my long-time friend and colleague, Tom Liner, who worked with the teachers in his school district in developing and getting these reviews to me. "Thanks!"

EXPIRATION DATES ARE IMPORTANT

We certainly don't want any of our readers to expire, one way or another! Please check the expiration date printed on your address label. If you are nearing expiration, get revived promptly with a check to Dr. Mary Sucher, 1776 Brookview Road, Baltimore, MD 21222.

In order to keep our rates so low, we need your help in keeping up with your expiration date. Sending out notices is costly and erodes our efforts to keep costs down. If you want to avoid constant concern, take advantage of the lower 3-year rate.

Since there has been some misunderstanding about notices and currency of membership, here is some information which may help. First, all such notices include a disclaimer allowing for errors in our records. Hard as it may be, to accept, we cannot claim infallibility. After all, your renewal goes to the Treasurer/ Membership Chair, then to the Editorial Offices, and then to NCTE Headquarters for entry in the computer file. The label you read has been printed by the computer there.

Now a word about records. Suppose you paid on the following dates: Nov. '79, Nov. '80, May '82, and May '83. Your expiration date would be 11/83, exactly four years after you joined. Note that four annual payments had been made. In this case you would get a reminder less than a year after your last payment. Here is another example: Suppose you paid on these dates: Nov. '78, Nov. '79, Sept. '80, Nov. '82. Your expiration date would be 11/83, one year after your last payment. Yes, this is not consistent with the first example.

Here's the explanation: In the first example, the membership lapsed for only six months; in the second example it lapsed for more than six months — fourteen months to be precise. Such neglect in renewing will result in your records being deleted from the computer file, and any subsequent payment will be treated as a new membership.

As you can see, there is a grace period. But this is a *limited* grace period. Also, a renewal during the grace period cannot achieve an expiration date calculated from the payment date. Otherwise, we would be supporting up to 18-month memberships for each payment.

Please help keep the cost down by renewing promptly, and if we have made an error, please remind us — *gently*. We're only human, and the computer can't read your note.

W.G.E.

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

"A National Survey to Determine the Status of the Young Adult Novel in the Secondary School English Classroom, Grades 7-12."

Barbara G. Samuels, University of Houston, 1982 ***Thesis Director: Richard Abrahamson***

Recognizing that young adult novels are transitions to adult literature, serve important developmental and cognitive needs of students, and encourage lifetime reading habits, this study attempted to determine the status of the genre in secondary schools. The goals were twofold. The study surveyed a random sample of teachers to determine what they knew and how they felt about young adult novels. Secondly, the questionnaire analyzed the uses of the young adult novel in secondary schools.

Procedure

Four hundred sixty questionnaires were mailed to a random national sample of secondary English teachers in grades seven through twelve who are members of the National Council of Teachers of English and subscribe to the *English Journal*. Sixty-eight percent of the questionnaires were returned. Results were compiled and analyzed using SPSS procedures including Frequencies, Crosstabs, T-Test, and Breakdown as well as consideration of teachers' written comments.

Conclusions

Response to the questionnaire indicated that teachers in general agreed that young adult novels were transitions to adult literature, served important developmental and cognitive needs of students, and encouraged lifetime reading habits. Teachers' familiarity with the genre was one important factor in their use of young adult novels in the classroom and in their attitude. Two-thirds of the teachers had read some of the older young adult titles like *The Outsiders* and *Pigman*, but newer titles like *Jacob Have I Loved* and *After the First Death* had been read by very few teachers. Although 60% had never taken a course in young adult literature, a majority indicated interest in taking a course. Almost unanimously (91%), respondents agreed that new English teachers should take a course in adolescent literature.

Only a few young adult novels were among those teachers frequently listed as required reading. *Huckleberry Finn, A Separate Peace, The Scarlet Letter, Lord of the Flies,* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* were the five books most often required. *Pigman* was listed sixth, *The Outsiders,* tenth, and *The Contender,* eighteenth. In all, teachers listed 358 different titles of required novels. Respondents' listings of students' favorite novels were dominated by young adult titles with *The Outsiders* ranking first.

Comments on the questionnaire as well as responses to questions indicated that teachers believe young adult novels, if included in the curriculum, belong on the junior high level. More young adult novels were required reading in junior high schools; more young adult novels were favorites of junior high students; junior high teachers had read more novels on the selected list; and there was a significant difference between junior and senior high school teachers in attitude toward young adult novels.

The surey found that English teachers generally believed that the senior high program should consist primarily of recognized, mature works of adult fiction. They used young adult novels primarily with students of lower ability levels. This study proposed that as they work to encourage more widespread use of young adult novels in the schools, proponents of young adult literature must understand that many English teachers think that their role in teaching literature is to transmit a literary heritage by introducing students to the classics. At the same time, teachers must learn to appreciate the growing sophistication and popularity of young adult novels, incorporate them into their literature programs, and help to encourage students to discover the joy in books.

Recommendations included making young adult literature courses mandatory for new English teachers and available on the graduate level for practicing teachers, effort by journals in the field to increase circulation, and cooperation between NCTE and IRA to promote young adult literature by offering workshops in adolescent literature throughout the country.

Neufeld — Continued from page 2

This has always seemed to be specious. A child grows in an environment in which, plainly, adults do count, do rule the roosts. How can we isolate what concerns a child from his/her surroundings? (I ask this not of teachers and librarians, or parents, alone, but also of other writers who have zeroed in so tightly on a child's singular life. Children can and do ask questions of adults; they can and do come to adults for guidance and support.)

I've tried, therefore, in my own work, to put adults as much in the light as young adults. And because of this, not to mention the fact that as years progress, one is further from youth oneself, I begin to find adult characters more interesting and challenging, more varied and flawed, more central to any story that's worth telling to or about young people. After all, as I grow older, so do they — young readers. If my world is mostly that of an adult, theirs soon will be.

Which is why, I think, the character of the mother in *Sharelle* is so important — not simply to the story, but to me and the progress of what I write.

Without Melba Marston there is no Sharelle. Not simply in a physical sense, but metaphorically. It is Melba who provides the tension, the drive behind the story. It is she who has the sense of humor, the selfishness, the *fear* that animates the entire book. True enough, what happens in *Sharelle* is Sharelle's story: her problems, her solutions. But it is Melba who shapes them all.

And Melba is a wreck. She's loose. She's small-minded. She drinks. She sleeps around. There is a patina of civic-mindedness atop all this; a layer of community concern. But it is as sheer and porous as her own affection for her two daughters. On a sliding scale, Melba's efforts at motherhood would rank near the bottom. As a *liver*, Melba's right up there at the top.

I don't think young people will dismiss Melba or find her unsympathetic. They may not have women in their own lives with whom to compare, but they'll recognize her, instinctively. Just as they'll recognize Sharelle's pride and determination even if they don't agree with her life decisions.

That *Sharelle* is a story of responsibility and its limits, of one young woman's understanding of what adult acts lead to alongside her mother's flight from aging and loneliness, is purposeful. It *is* a dual story. People do live side by side and have to solve problems in proximity. Melba's story is somewhat more oblique than Sharelle's, necessarily. *Her* problems are simply not as concrete as her daughter's. Their solutions are gradual, whereas for Sharelle, solutions must be immediate. Both stories are, I think, worth telling.

I used to think that the projects I wanted to work on had to be "firsts." I did not want, for example, to take a stab at writing about a blind girl in East Harlem and incest (a suggestion once made sincerely by an editor to me). (The rejection of that idea comes more from the editor's choice of victim and circumstance more than anything else; I found it shockingly smug and stereotypical and untrue.)

But one of the ideas that seems to come clearer with age is that, truly, there are really only seventeen good stories in all the world, or variations thereon (or twelve, or two). One can't always be first. What one can be is oneself. One can learn to have faith in one's own approach to a situation. One can invent new and vivid characters to use in dealing with an old tension. From there, ideally, come new solutions to hoary problems based on characters.

I still believe in what I write. I still believe that almost everything I write is somehow political. I still want people to agree with my point of view. I still aim my darts at undersized targets — and that is not meant pejoratively. Those darts, if well and truly aimed, will stick in someone's side so that they will become part of the baggage or equipment a growing person carries into a growing and grown-up world.

That's enough for me.

John Neufeld is the author of *Edgar Allan; Lisa, Bright and Dark; A Small Civil War,* among others, and the forthcoming *Sharelle.*

SUMMER WORKSHOP SCHEDULED IN COLORADO

"Joy in Literature" is the theme for the two-week workshop being offered at the University of Colorado, Boulder, from June 27 - July 8, 1983. The focus will be especially for secondary English teachers, reading teachers, and librarians. M.E. Kerr, author of such popular adolescent books as *Little Little; Gentlehands; Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack; If I Love You, Am I Trapped Forever?; Is That You, Miss Blue?;* and *I'll Love You When You're More Like Me,* will be a guest during the first week. Ken Donelson, Professor at Arizona State University, Tempe, and currently co-editor of *English Journal,* will be the guest during the second week. Large group presentations will be followed by small group discussions and demonstrations, with opportunities for social, cultural, and physical activities.

For more information please contact Dr. Ruth Cline, Adolescent Literature Workshop, Box 249, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309. Telephone (303) 492-6123 or 492-7142.